

The Numismatist

FOR COLLECTORS OF COINS, MEDALS, TOKENS
AND PAPER MONEY

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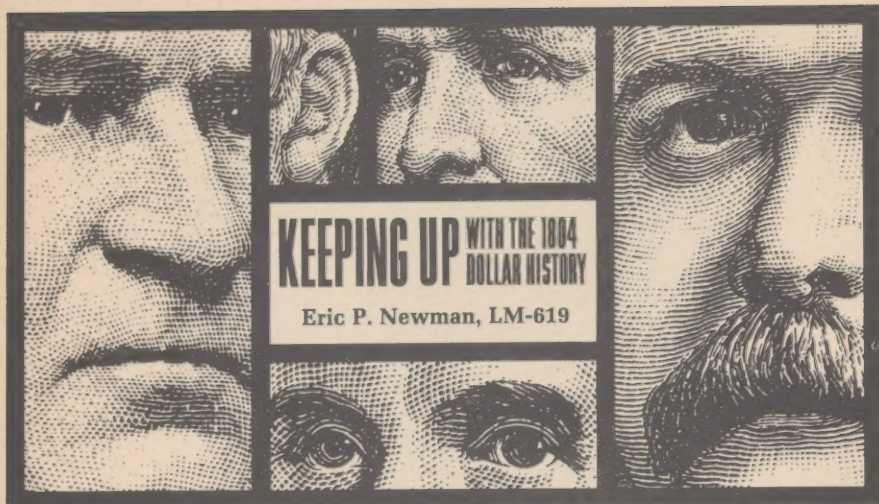
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Although robbery, burglary and undisclosed ownership have done more than their part to add romance to current 1804 dollar history, there is also some interesting earlier data which can be added to what is included in modern writing on the subject.⁽¹⁾

The Weyl Sale of the Dexter Dollar

The deviousness of S. H. and H. Chapman in the acquisition of the Dexter Class I 1804 Dollar can now be further documented. Edouard Frossard, in 1884-5, charged that the 1804 dollar sold at auction in Berlin on October 13, 1884, by Adolph Weyl to the Chapman brothers was not the same coin the Chapmans auctioned on May 14, 1885. ⁽²⁾ Based upon this assertion a speculation was made that the Chapmans wished to develop a foreign source for the initial appearance of an unrecorded 1804 dollar to give it a distant pedigree and thereby take the heat off the Philadelphia Mint officials and John W. Haseltine as surreptitious distributors of 1804 dollars. The idea that the Dexter 1804 Dollar never left Philadelphia and was merely used as a basis for a fictitious auction sale in Berlin was included as a possibility. ⁽³⁾

In the extensive research on the

1804 dollar during the intervening period, it was strange that no one examined the Adolph Weyl sale catalogue to support or refute Frossard's charges. There was good reason. The distribution of that catalogue must have been quite limited as it took a five-year search before I was fortunate enough to locate a copy in the Austrian National Numismatic Collection in Vienna. Through the co-operation of Dr. Bernhard Koch and Prof. Dr. Eduard Holzmaier, the following descriptive text and the illustration of Lot 159 of the October 13, 1884, sale conducted by Adolph Weyl in Berlin was obtained:

159 Silber — Dollar 1804. Brustbild & Adler. E' Genau mit der Abbildung der im Jahre 1875 Zu New York versteigerten No. 535 der Collection Cohen ubereinstimmend; Randshrift jedoch auf vorliegendem Exemplar nur schwach ausgepragt.



The photograph of the plaster cast used for the illustration in the Weyl Catalogue showing unknown "die breaks" but identifiable as taken from the Dexter specimen by the diagonal dent on the lock of hair adjacent to the shoulder drapery.

(translation)

159 Silver Dollar 1804. Bust and eagle. Unc. Corresponding exactly with the illustration of the one auctioned in 1875 in New York as Lot 535 of the Cohen Collection; edge legend, however, on the present specimen is only weakly impressed.

Many differences can be noticed when comparing the illustration of the 1804 dollar in the Weyl catalogue with pictures of every known struck piece including the Dexter specimen.

On the obverse of the Weyl illustration there can be seen:

1. An apparent die break between the front of the drapery and the border beading.
2. An apparent die break between the 4 o'clock point of the lowest left star and the nearest curl.
3. A horizontal protrusion on the right side above the center of the upright of the I of LIBERTY.

4. Casting bubbles on the third lowest star on the right side.

On the reverse of the Weyl illustration there can be seen:

1. A dented area above and to the right of the central star in the second row.
2. The O in OF and the surrounding area has scratches and roughness.
3. The TE in UNITED is surrounded with casting imperfections.
4. The central part of the outline of the left side of the shield is missing.
5. An apparent die crack between the lower part of the claw on the right and the border below.
6. A raised dot between E and R of AMERICA.
7. A depressed semicircle at the base of the first A in AMERICA.

The inescapable conclusion is that the Weyl illustration is of a piece



A diagonal dent on the lock of hair adjacent to the shoulder drapery identifies the Dexter Class I 1804 Dollar.

made by using a casting process. This could include an electrotype of the coin, a plaster cast of the coin, or a plaster cast made from an electrotype of the coin. The photograph shows detail much too sharply for the piece to be a nineteenth century cast metal forgery. The damaged areas, weak areas and casting bubbles are commonly found on both electrotypes and plaster casts. Die breaks do not appear on electrotypes unless they originally existed on the coin itself, but a study of some illustrations of plaster casts of coins shows that what appear to be die breaks could have occurred independently. In making plaster casts for photography in 1884, the coin or the foil separator was removed from a moist plaster negative. In the drying process the negative sometimes developed small cracks, and when the plaster for the positive was applied to such a negative, the positive would then have raised lines where

the cracks in the negative were. These would appear exactly like die breaks. The picture in the Weyl catalogue is therefore of a plaster cast, and Frossard was correct in his observation of differences, but incorrect in his conclusion that it was not the same coin which the Chapmans auctioned in 1885. There are specific individual defects which show up both on the Weyl illustration and on the Dexter piece, an obvious one being the dent sloping down to the right on the lock of hair touching the shoulder drapery and just above its center.

Analyzing the Weyl illustration further, it can be realized that no electrotype had been used for the photography. An electrotype could not have had a lettered edge. Because the photograph of the edge shows the edge receding, the picture must have been of the coin itself rather than of a plaster cast. A picture of a plaster impression of the

edge would have been an impression on a flat surface.

Thus, it appears that Frossard's accusation was erroneous and that the 1804 dollar auctioned was in Weyl's hands.

The fact that the edge was photographed and commented upon in the text of the catalogue was, however, an indication that some American numismatist had assisted in the description and promotion of the coin. Other lots on the same page of the Weyl catalogue listed uncirculated early U. S. dollars which had identical lettered edges, but the lettered edges are not even mentioned in the one-line descriptions of those pieces. There was no apparent reason for Adolph Weyl to feature and discuss the edge unless he was told to do so. He certainly would not have been able to comment that the edge was weaker than the Cohen Class I piece auctioned in New York in 1875 because he would have had no way of examining the Cohen coin and the edge was not even mentioned in the Cohen sale catalogue.⁽⁴⁾ Weyl also stated in his catalogue that his piece was exactly like the Cohen illustration, but the Cohen illustration was of the obverse only. Weyl was auc-

tioning a piece far superior to the Cohen coin in condition and should have commented on its superiority rather than its minor inferiority.

It seems clear from the foregoing that Weyl had American advice in preparing the text of his description and in selecting the edge for illustration. Whoever gave that advice must have seen the coin. Therefore, the finger points to the Chapmans as having been familiar with the coin before it was catalogued and having prepared its description to assure its identification as a Class I piece. The edge was featured in the Weyl description because the recall of the Class II restrikes with plain edges in the 1859-60 period was not forgotten by some American numismatists.

The Weyl catalogue and the interpretation of its content seems to support the conclusion that the Chapmans sent the piece to Weyl to give it an apparent European origin and prearranged its "purchase" so that it could be resold in the United States. Auctioning American pieces for the first time in a foreign country is a practice which still continues in order to prevent potential buyers from ascertaining the true source of pieces auctioned.

Alterations and Fakes

The Zerbe 1804 and 1805 dollar alterations were written up in detail in *The Numismatist* for October, 1961, but I was not then familiar with the opinion of Farran Zerbe with respect to them. Zerbe himself, in a talk about and exhibition of false rarities before the New York Numismatic Club in 1944, had them on display. He first pointed out that, "the gem product of coin surgeons has been earlier dated dollars to place them in the high society class groomed like 1804's. The last figure in the date is successfully amputated and grafting of a 4 to replace the re-

moved number is so clever you cannot tell the difference. The operation is quite a success." He then humorously remarked: "The notable false 'rarity' is the 1805 dollar. It was 'discovered' in Europe, noted as the only one known, and was cable news to the U. S. It is rarer than that; none is known."⁽⁵⁾

The Zerbe 1804 and 1805 dollar alterations were stolen from Alfred J. Ostheimer's home in Honolulu on June 14, 1968, but were fortunately recovered with most of his superb collection of early U. S. dollars.

The curious claims for the Spiers's

electrotype (6) of the 1804 dollar can be further amplified. Dr. Charles Spiers gave his collection in 1877 to the Society of California Pioneers which placed it in safekeeping and for study at the U. S. Mint in San Francisco. Case #28 contained "every coinage of the silver dollar by our Government since 1794 to the present time" according to the extensive catalogue of the collection published in 1877. The 1804 dollar was described as the rarest and the five auction prices of 1804 dollars in the prior 16 years were listed. A few days before the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 Farran Zerbe examined the Spiers's dollar which was still at the San Francisco Mint and described it as "a counterfeit of a fake." Continuing his invectives, he pronounced the catalogue of the Spiers's collection "a monument to numismatic ignorance." (7)

"The Keokuk 1804 Dollar" is the story of a wild goose chase by Ted Hammer. The dollar was allegedly found by a second-hand dealer in a

stove bought from a junk dealer. The second-hand dealer was short of rent money and obtained a \$375 credit on his rent when he parted with his find. Its illustration shows it to be an obvious alteration. (8) Following this story, a Columbus, Ohio, collector reported he had located an 1803 (small) dollar altered into an 1804, and that to tell the difference it could be noticed that Liberty on the altered dollar had a frown while Liberty on a true 1804 dollar was happy. (9) Presumably the alteration operation caused permanent injuries resulting in chronic pain.

In 1964 there was an amusing incident about another 1804 alteration. A letter to the editor of *The Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* stated: "It is generally unknown that a genuine 1804 dollar is in the collection of Frank R. Liveright in the Newark Museum." A reply to that statement indicated that the letter writer in one sense was correct; that is, such a situation will continue to remain generally unknown because the coin is a skillful alteration. (10)

Commentary in Earlier Coin Catalogues

The remarks as to the 1804 dollar from the 1893 through the 1916 editions of those Scott Standard Catalogues covering silver coins are of interest:

1804. The dies for this coin are known to have existed and from them it is believed about 20 impressions have been taken, but we do not think that any were struck in the year the coins are dated; hence, we class them as restrikes. The dies were destroyed in 1869.

This statement indicates that the editor of those publications believed that the dies for the 1804 dollar were made in 1804 but were not used until much later. He therefore felt that all of the pieces were restrikes. While this belief was in error, the conclu-

sion that there were no 1804 dollars struck in 1804 was nevertheless sound.

David Proskey, in publishing a catalogue for the New York Coin & Stamp Co. in 1889, did not illustrate the 1804 dollar and merely commented, "No authentic originals known." By 1894 he put in an illustration of the piece and described all 1804 dollars as restrikes but continued his opinion that "No authentic ORIGINALS are known." Therefore, he, too, felt then that the dies were made in 1804. He became enlightened in due course and in an advertisement in 1927 included his revised opinion that the "die was not cut until 1835." (11)

Wayte Raymond up to 1944 listed,

without comment, the two reverse varieties of the 1804 dollar in his Standard Catalogues. Then he included:

1804. The first dollar of this date was acquired from the mint about 1845. The dies being extant, several others were struck between that time and 1878. The later strikes are from the second die. Of those struck from the first die only six are known.

This commentary did not denote any antedating or any background for the Class I pieces and was withdrawn in the 1950 edition. The Class II and Class III restrikes were described in a separate section on restrikes beginning in 1951. In the 1953 edition, the Class I pieces are "tentatively listed with the regular series" and the information is substantially expanded so as to include the statement, "The present dollars known with the date 1804 could not have been made before November, 1836, as these bear clear evidence of having been made with either a steam or a hydraulic press and a 'close collar' which squashed the edge lettering practically to invisibility. * * *

All of which adds up to the conclusion that they were made between 1836 and 1842, and probably in or after 1838 — for trading purposes, to augment the newly formed Mint Cabinet." This commentary continued until the final edition of the Standard Catalogue in 1957. It showed that logical assumptions instead of fiction could be openly stated even if some erroneous assertions and conclusions had been included.

The first publication of *A Guide Book of United States Coins* (Racine, 1946) carried a statement showing the divided opinion regarding the origin, date of issue and authenticity of the 1804 dollar and giving many of the arguments pro and con. The beaded edge segments and raised borders were shown to conform more to 1836-1842 coinage than to 1803 or prior coinage. There was virtually no change in the text until 1962 when the Siam set was revealed and *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar* was published. Since Kenneth E. Bressett was one of the authors of the latter and also the coordinating editor of the *Guide Book*, the fact of antedating was then conclusively presented.

Comedy of Errors

A comical blopper as to the 1804 dollar occurred in a published article entitled "The Mint Manual" by E. Oelsner.⁽¹²⁾ In that article the alleged Oelsner claims for himself participation in the research and the publication of "The Fantastic 1804 Dollar." I had never heard of any such participant and felt that an inquiry was in order. I was surprised to learn that a non-de-plume was used for that article. Someone just forgot to change the text so that Lynn Glasser's concealed authorship of the article would not have been so obvious.

Another assortment of numismatic errors resulted from the October 4, 1967, robbery and burglary at the

Florida home of Mr. and Mrs. Willis du Pont when either the Cohen Class I 1804 Dollar or the Linderman Class III 1804 Dollar or both were taken. For some reason a numismatic newspaper reported that it was the Stickney Class I piece which had been stolen.⁽¹³⁾ Subsequently, after a few of the other coins taken in the theft had been ransomed, the Florida police learned that an 1804 dollar was available and set an elaborate trap for its "purchase." The scheme was skillfully carried out, resulting in the arrest of the possessor. The recovered coin turned out to be an altered date 1804 dollar and not one of the du Pont pieces.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Diplomatic Front

Some additional contemporary commentary on the gift of presentation sets of U. S. coins to the Imaum of Muscat has been located. In 1838 W. S. W. Ruschenberger published *A Voyage Round the World Including an Embassy to Muscat and Siam* in 1835, 1836 and 1837. He was a surgeon in the U. S. Navy and sailed on the U.S.S. Peacock with Edmund Roberts, the special agent of the United States, and on the U.S. Schooner Enterprise. He mentioned the gifts in the following passage relating to Muscat:

In conformity with this usage, a variety of articles was presented to the Sultan by the United States, amongst which were a sword and altagan, with gold scabbards and

mountings, Tanner's Map of the United States, an American flag, a set of American coins, several rifles, a number of cut glass lamps, a quantity of American nankin, known as Forsyth's nankin, etc. (p. 91)

The references in the same book to the gifts for the King of Siam do not specifically mention the coins:

Immediately after the feast was cleared away, the governor demanded a list of the presents intended for his Magnificent Majesty, but it was refused. (p. 273)

In front of the mission were displayed part of the presents brought by Mr. Roberts, the whole being too bulky for such a pageant. (p. 333)

Finis

Who knows, perhaps even an 1804 dollar of presently undisclosed ownership soon will reappear for auction just to stimulate further discussion about its unusual birth and family background.

Information furnished for this ar-

ticle by Kenneth E. Bressett, John J. Ford, Jr., Rogers M. Fred, Jr., and Henry Grunthal is gratefully acknowledged. The English translation of the German in the Weyl catalogue and the correspondence to obtain it was a kindness of Carol Langreder and Sue Sale of St. Louis.

Footnotes

1. Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett, *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar* (Racine, 1962); Eric P. Newman, "Updating the Fantastic 1804 Dollar", *Whitman's Monthly Journal* (September, 1964); James C. Risk, "Further Thoughts about the 1804 Class I Dollar and Proof Eagle", *The Numismatist* (November, 1969); Robert W. Julian, "Origin of the 1804 Dollar", *The Numismatist* (January, 1970); Eric P. Newman and Don Taxay, "An Answer to 1804 Dollar and Eagle Challenges", *The Numismatist* (February, 1970).
2. *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar*, p. 91.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
5. Farran Zerbe, "False Rare Coins", *The Numismatist* (March, 1944), pp. 199, 200.
6. *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar*, p. 106.
7. Oscar H. Dodson, "The Legendary Farran Zerbe", *The Numismatist* (September, 1969), p. 1198; "America's Pioneer Coin Collector", *COINage* (March, 1968), p. 22.
8. *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* (December, 1937), p. 277.
9. *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* (January, 1938), p. 6.
10. *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine* (October, 1964, p. 2678; November, 1964), p. 2983; *Whitman Numismatic Journal* (September, 1964).
11. *The Numismatist* (November, 1927), p. 703.
12. *Whitman Numismatic Journal* (February, 1966).
13. *Coin World* (October 5, 1967).
14. *Coin World* (September 3, 1969 and November 5, 1969).